

"OUR SONS AND DAUGHTERS;"

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BY THE

REV. CHARLES CHAPMAN, M.A.

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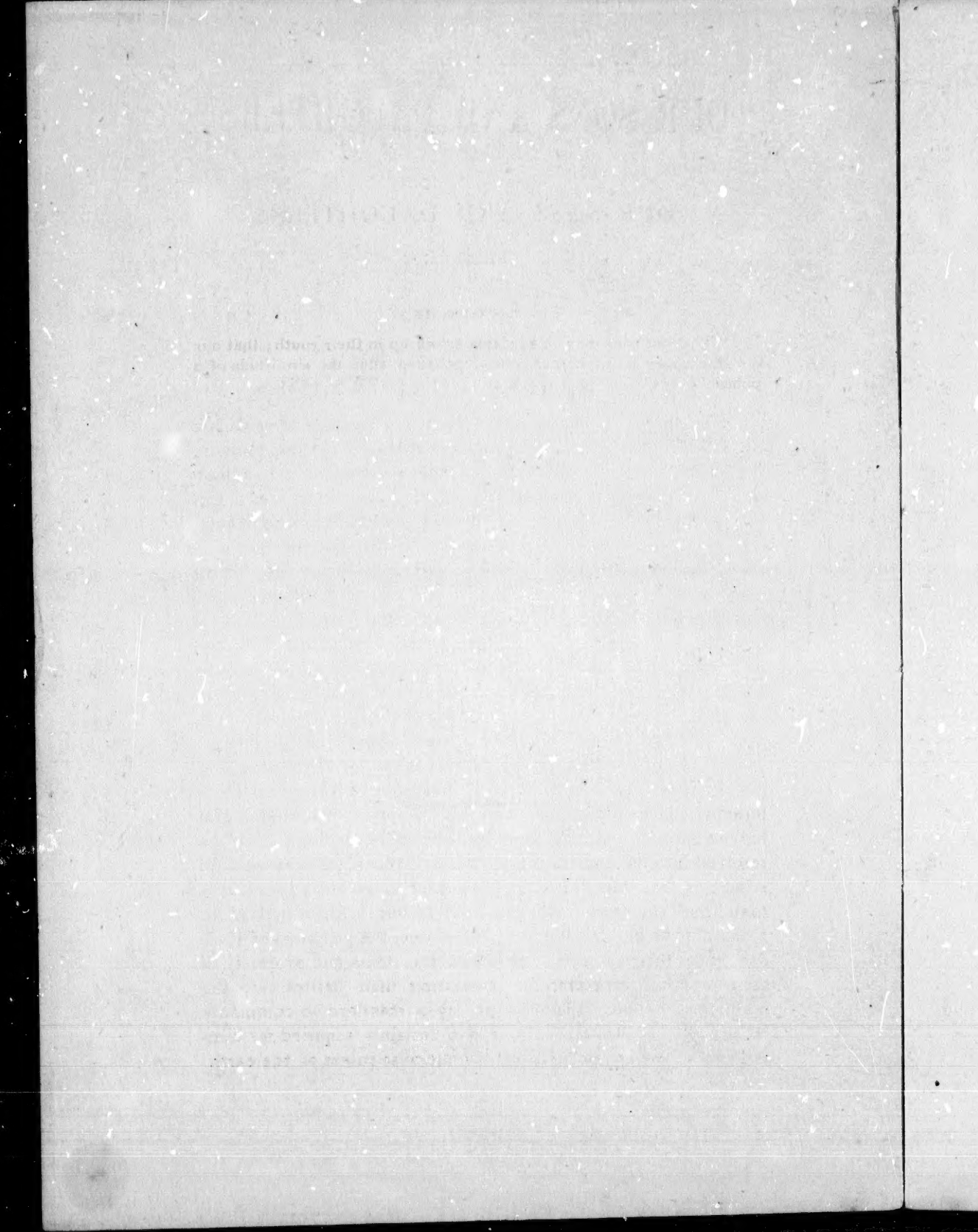
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## “OUR SONS AND DAUGHTERS.”

CLXIV. PSALM, 12 v.

“That our sons may be as plants grown up in their youth; that our daughters may be as corner-stones, polished after the similitude of a palace.”

Wisdom and folly are not the exclusive heritage of any class of men. Wisdom is a fragrant flower that may be found on any soil duly cultivated; and folly is a rank weed which may absorb the nourishment of the best land when not duly cared for. There have been philosophers in rags, and fools in fine purple. The cottage and the palace alike may be the abode of true wisdom; and no section of the human family, however begirt with conventional privileges, can debar the rest of their kind from enjoying the distinction of a place among the wise.

The history of nations is a perpetual revelation of human character, and it affords many instances both of the folly and the wisdom of royal personages. The leaders of men have often done infinite mischief to the world by the stupid perversity and obstinate blindness of their will; and some, on the other hand, have, by the correctness of their judgment on practical matters, and the righteousness of their administration, won for themselves a foremost place among the chief benefactors of mankind. The highest form of practical sagacity, like all other things, may be resolved into its constituent elements. When we examine into what it is that constitutes the wisdom of kings and princes, it is found that there are two principal factors without which no monarch can be deemed wise,—the one, the goodness of their desires for their subjects; the other, the fitness and propriety of their practical measures for translating their desires into the realities of national life. Tested by a standard so commonly recognized, the Royal Psalmist has certainly acquired for himself a most exalted position among the wise rulers of the earth.

For, if you read this Psalm through it will be seen that, taken as a whole, it is a monarch's expression of earnest benevolent feeling on behalf of the people over whom he reigned; and, also, an eager looking up to God for His special aid in bringing to pass the realization of his desires. In so far as he thought of the welfare of his realm as being connected with the character of his people, he yearned to see the wicked diminished and the good increased. "Rid me and deliver me from the hand of *strange children*,"—that is to say, from the presence and influence of those whose vile habits and low tastes make them real aliens to the State—persons who, while using the common language, and sharing in the benefit of public institutions, are destitute of the true spirit of patriotism. As a supplement to this freedom from pernicious characters, he hoped that his sons and daughters might grow up in healthful vigour and pleasing gracefulness. Nor did he expect to see such a happy issue brought to pass merely by means of wise human legislation, elaborate systems of moral instruction, or pompous military authority. Sensible of the need of a Higher Power to touch the springs of human action and fashion the life of a nation, he, with the fervour which ever characterizes the loftiest natures, acknowledged his dependence on God, and explicitly sought the intervention of His mighty hand in accomplishing so great and important an end.

The language of the Psalmist is the property of all good men. Patriots whose patriotism is at all intelligent, State functionaries who measure their responsibilities to God, and especially all Christian parents, can pronounce a hearty "Amen" to the prevailing sentiment of this Psalm. We may, therefore, notice in more detail its teaching with reference to our youth; and in so doing, let us observe:—

1st. *The position of importance assigned to the young in an estimate of a nation's welfare.*

Here the young are not put in a corner as though too insignificant for a royal statesman's regard. We have in this Psalm a brief but graphic sketch of national prosperity—a representation of well-being which every man who loves his country will desire

to see realized. And it is worthy of observation that, in the enumeration of the elements which enter into the sum of a people's happiness, the children are made to occupy the foremost place. For next to the desired deliverance of the nation from the influence of *strange children*, there comes a prayer that "our sons may be as plants grown up in their youth; that our daughters may be as corner-stones, polished after the similitude of a palace."

The longer we live, and the more we see of the world and understand what transpires among men, the more do we see how unchangeably wise is the Bible in its references to the means and conditions of human welfare—both domestic and national. We are an advancing people in the direction of secular knowledge and material conquests over nature; but this old Book is ever in advance of all our thoughts and exertions in relation to those matters which enter into the highest development of society. The past century has witnessed marvellous improvements on the knowledge and resources enjoyed by our forefathers—so much so that, in our lighter and brighter moods, we are wont to indulge in a smile at the modicum of convenience and comfort with which they seemed to be contented. Yet the more we grapple with the moral and spiritual difficulties which, in the midst, and in spite of our modern civilization, confront our spirits and mar our material prosperity, the more do we fall back on the Bible as being the chief authority and safest guide on the momentous matters which lie at the foundation of all permanent, public good. Just as sailors now-a-days, with all their superior knowledge and appliances, cannot afford to dispense with the light of the old sun, the guidance of the old stars, and the ceaseless mobility of the ocean; so, in the passage of mankind over the rough and dangerous sea of Time towards the unknown shores of Eternity, we derive from the teachings of the Bible the most important contribution to our safety and success. The Bible, then, would have us pay prime attention to our children. It gives them the first place in the catalogue of elements that form the totality of the public welfare. Every prudent man who has a spark of ambition in his soul, will desire to see entering into the prosperity of a nation, a widely-extended and honourably-conducted com-

merce agriculture so applied as to develop the richest resources of the soil, such a prevalence of the comforts and necessities of life that the lowliest may know the content which never complains, institutions of benevolence and justice for the relief of unavoidable sorrow and the maintenance of order, a literature lofty in tone, broad in its range, and stamped with the impress of truth and beauty; and, also, such moderately-appointed defences as may serve to render our borders safe from the intrusion of the mischievous and the vile. Let there be all these material and secular blessings, and many more; add to them by every possible contrivance consistent with uprightness of spirit and reverence for the Eternal, and yet the question comes with incisive and resistless force—What of our children? Nations are not made up of deep-set mountains, fertile vales, and rolling rivers that carry your commerce down to the sea; nor of the means of rapid locomotion and swift transit of intelligence from one end of the land to the other; nor even of men and women who toil and rest, weep and rejoice. Prosperity does not lie in lands, and banks, and commerce; nor does it live and die with those whose hands and brains have accumulated wealth and scattered plenty. Our children are more to us than all our holdings; they are more enduring than the hills; more precious in the freight they bear than all our fleets; they are the inheritors of our folly or wisdom, our moral debasement or our piety. Their mental culture, their well-acquired knowledge, and their holiness of life, are of greater moment than all besides. Take a home—any home you please; it may be well furnished, amply provided with comforts and luxuries,—the very perfection of artistic taste and wise utility,—an enviable and legitimate object even of Christian desire and labour to passers-by. But what of the children who dwell there? Are they its brightest and most lovely ornaments? Is the music of their free tongues the sweetest that falls on parents' ears? Are they cultured, refined, chivalrous, loving, and pious? Is the natural and acquired finish of their character in accord with the exquisite material surroundings amidst which they live? Are they by virtue of their pure and noble character the brightest gems and most precious treasures in that home? You who have attained to years of maturity, and especially you whose heads are white with

the snow of age, know from widely-extended observation, as also from, it may be, a strangely-mingled experience, that our children are the most important elements to our comfort, our joy, our honour, our rest of soul,—in short, our most valued prosperity. If they are sick, or paralyzed, or ignorant, or coarse, or untruthful, or ungrateful, or deeply vile, then, indeed, does a dark shadow fall athwart life's weary pathway. If, on the other hand, they enjoy the blessing of blooming health, are well instructed, endued with a fine sense of honour, generous, loving, brightened and beautified by the pulsation of a heart full of sincere, unaffected piety, then, whatever the splendour or plainness of our dwelling, and the fulness or poverty of our resources, home is gladsome and blessed indeed, and a nation of such homes is of all nations the most happy and prosperous.

2nd. *The description given of youthful excellence.*

"That our sons may be as *plants, grown up in their youth*; that our daughters may be as *corner-stones, polished after the similitude of a palace.*" In the reference to "plants" and "corner-stones" as illustrative of the excellence of young men and maidens, we recognize an allusion to two sets of qualities and two departments of usefulness. Our "sons" should be characterized by *vigour*—fresh, and strong, and healthy as "plants." Our "daughters" should be characterized by *comeliness*—"polished after the similitude of a palace."

There is, you are aware, a special distinguishing quality for every object and creature on earth, by means of which it is known, or is to be known, from others that may resemble it in other particulars. It may share in common qualities; but there is one which is its leading feature, its sign of difference, its abiding and most conspicuous virtue. Thus, the rose is known among flowers, apart from its form and colour, by its special sweetness of perfume; vinegar by its peculiar sourness; metal by its unchangeable hardness. A fox shares in the common qualities of animals; but its prominent characteristic is cunning; while a lamb is characteristically guileless, innocent, and frolicsome.

In harmony with this diversity in nature, the leading characteristic of our sons should be *vigour*,—as plants full of life

and freshness; not stunted, shrivelled, pale and feeble, ever quivering on the confines of death, but abounding with health and strength of body and soul. If you notice a tree, you will not fail to observe that it is a most wonderful instance of the vigour of life, sending forth, as it does, its living sap through every fibre from the lowest root to the loftiest leaf, steadily forcing its way outward and causing the size, colour, and proportions of the entire mass of timber, bark, twigs, leaf and blossom to yield to its mighty silent power. Just so; the life in you young men, the bodily life, the mental life, and the religious life, should be a mighty power working vigorously through your entire nature—expanding, developing, freshening and beautifying your whole self. That being your ideal of vigour, see to it that you be not known as fine, feeble, dainty dandies, who cannot face a breeze or fear to soil their hands with honest toil. On the one side, avoid the rough, coarse, rude, and slovenly habits and tastes of those who pride themselves in bearishness of growl and action; and, on the other, eschew the mincing, effeminate, foppish ways of those who, having neither the breed of true gentlemen in their blood or brains, nor the grace and natural sweetness of ladies, perpetually offend good society by their mawkish sentimentality and fussy nonsense. Be full of the naturalness which becomes young men; fresh with a well-cared-for stock of bodily and mental health; pervaded by a pure and wholesome life which draws its nourishment from the gentle dews of God's Spirit, and the reviving beams of the Sun of Righteousness.

"Daughters" differ from "sons" in the quality which should chiefly characterize them. They are to be as "corner-stones polished after the similitude of a palace,"—that is to say, they should be distinguished for *comeliness*, embracing, as this does, the quiet gentle graces which embellish private and domestic life. When our daughters become free and easy with everybody on every occasion, loud and ready with their tongue under all circumstances, bold and fond of public exhibitions of themselves for the sake of publicity, then do they cease to be clothed with that loveliness which has ever given to woman her mighty silent power over rougher and stronger natures. Let there be a cultivation of bodily vigour for the sake of health, and let the mind

be braced by studious application to difficult subjects, because of the advantages accruing from extended knowledge and mental discipline ; but take care, amidst the dangers incident to modern life, that you never lose the quiet, graceful, retiring, self-contained spirit ; the delicate sense ; the refinement and the fine perception of the more subtle and tender moralities which form the charm of domestic life, and enhance the power and beauty of female piety.

And as sons and daughters have their respective virtues, so have they their respective departments of usefulness. The power of our "sons" is to be exercised *outside*—in general activity, "as plants." Their vigour is to enrich the world with fruitfulness of action. The power of our "daughters" is to be *at home*—in domestic influence. Their presence is to be as the quiet binding power of "corner-stones"—the means of holding together the entire fabric of social and domestic life. And a finer sphere of usefulness cannot be found than the home, where hearts are most open to wise counsel and winning affection, and where, also, those who are compelled by stress of circumstances, to fight the rough battles of life in daily business, know best how to appreciate the gentleness and love which tend to keep the heart tender and warm, and thus become refreshed for enduring calmly and manfully the trials and crosses of coming days of conflict. "Daughters" who learn the happy art of making home life sweet and restful to weary fathers, husbands, and brothers, render to mankind a most noble service, as do the "sons," who, with the love of God as the mainspring in their hearts, brave the hard world outside and acquire for themselves an honourable livelihood.

3rd. *The work requisite to ensure the prevalence of youthful excellence.*

When the Psalmist offered his prayer to God that his country might be blessed with the presence of sons and daughters of the class already referred to, it is obvious that he was prepared to use means which, in combination with dependence on Divine aid, were likely to bring such an event to pass. And in proportion as we are earnest in our desire to see our young people grow

up in Christian excellence, shall we apply with intelligence and zeal the means placed at our disposal by Providence for securing that object.

The basis of all successful effort, on behalf of the young, is to be found in the strength of our conviction as to the importance of their spiritual welfare. No great moral triumphs have ever been achieved apart from deep conviction. Earnestness of purpose and persistent endeavour to reach a goal have their root in the primary beliefs of the soul, and this is in no sphere of exertion more true than that of the higher education of youth. If we care more for their pleasure and artistic enjoyment of life, more for their social pride among their fellows, and more for their secular success than for the growth of their souls in Christliness, we shall not, in that case, take much interest in measures selected by more earnest hearts for promoting their salvation and spiritual culture. But if we really believe that strong and healthy piety—exhibiting its features variously in harmony with the natural aptitudes and social position of sons and daughters respectively—is “the one thing needful”—“the pearl of great price”—and of more value than the gain of the whole world, then, under the force of such impressions, we shall spare no pains to assist them to attain to such blessedness. May we hope, so far as you are concerned who are now attending to these remarks, that the unbelieving scoffers who live around and exercise their wonted gifts in weighing the professions and practices of Christians, can discover no valid ground for insinuating that you afford no practical evidence of the sincerity and intensity of your belief in the supreme importance of your children's salvation?

But as the basis of all persistent effort lies in our strong convictions of its necessity, so the beginning of it should always be made in our homes. A more grievous social and moral calamity could scarcely happen than would happen if public institutions and church action were to be taken as occasions for relieving ourselves, as parents, of what is our highest duty and honoured privilege. No external appliances, however wisely conceived and judiciously employed, can possibly be a substitute for parental care and affection. Civilization cannot improve on nature in the sphere of home life. Obligations based on the primary condition

of society, survive all the changes incident on external improvement. The loss of a parent's love and constant influence can never be compensated by elaborate systems of teaching in crowds. Home is, and must be, the centre of the holiest and tenderest influences. Our children are given to us not to be merely fed, clothed, and taught how to use their hands with skill for the keeping together of body and soul during the space of three-score years and ten; but to be trained in the nurture and admonition of the Lord, and so become qualified for a higher and nobler course when the mortal frame has been laid in the dust. Their souls are, therefore, precious in our sight. It may not, in every instance, be possible to carry out a course of systematic teaching at home—for there are circumstances in some families which preclude such a line of action; but it is possible in the poorest and busiest, as also in the richest and most quiet of homes, silently and orally to sow the seeds of sound principle, of reverence for things human and Divine, and of elevated taste; and, by the daily force of parental affection steeped in the tender love of God, to win young hearts over to the fellowship and service of Christ.

Beyond this, however, we should avail ourselves of the appliances furnished of the zeal and enterprise of the Church. Those most familiar with the history of mankind know well, that the religious training of the young is a work of such magnitude and difficulty as to demand every kind of wise agency to supplement our own exertions within the sphere of home,—the more so in an age of extreme activity and pressing fascination of evil under the semblance of good. It is of considerable value to associate our young people very early with Church life. There are hallowed remembrances in connection with God's "holy hill of Zion." A young heart is less lonely in the world when conscious of having in spiritual things a Church-home. Of many, it may be said that nearly all they know of the Scriptures has been learnt in the Sabbath-school, while we are constantly meeting with instances of persons who ascribe their deepest and most abiding impressions to the instruction and pious influence of teachers in the Sunday-school.

Looking at the subject in its negative aspect, one can hardly conceive of the vast moral and religious disaster that would

result from the closing henceforth of all our Sabbath-schools, What, in such a case, many parents would do with their children, through all the length of a Sabbath day, it is hard to say. Our most ordinary observation teaches us that, under such conditions, the degeneracy of the next generation would be as certain as would be the final decay of vegetation and beauty were the sun to set to rise no more.

The more thoroughly you consider the claims of youth on the Church's care—the more you reflect on the good which has already issued to home, Church and nation, from Sabbath-school instruction, and on the solemn charge to feed His lambs, delivered by Christ to one who was to give fairest proof of His love—the more earnest and hearty will be your co-operation with this good work.

And here let me ask you to aid us by sending, so far as may be within the range of possibility, your own children to the School of the Church to which you belong; by accepting the honourable office of teacher when clearly called thereto; by manifesting sympathy with those engaged by occasional visits to the School, and by joining in the prayers of the Church, that those who teach amidst many discouragements and hopes, may be strengthened and cheered from on High, and that those who are taught may be made the true children of God by the renewing of the Holy Ghost. By so doing, you will bless yourselves, and become more qualified to participate in the final joy of your Lord.